

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

June 7, 2004
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Marshall, Deputy Mayor Noble, and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak, Davidson, Degginger, and Lee

ABSENT: None

1. Executive Session

Mayor Marshall called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and announced the following changes to the agenda: 1) the order of the first two items will be switched, and 2) agenda item (d) has been postponed. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session

(b) Budget – Strategic Policy Discussions – Fire and Police Presentations

Deputy City Manager Ed Oberg opened discussion of the Fire and Police Department budget presentations.

Fire Chief Peter Lucarelli reviewed the primary services provided by the Fire Department:

- Fire suppression and rescue,
- Emergency Medical Services,
- Fire Prevention, and
- Emergency Preparedness Program.

In the City's 2004 budget survey, citizens ranked fire suppression and EMS as the two most important services provided by the City. Bellevue continues to be a national leader in cardiac survival rate and confining fires to the room of origin. Chief Lucarelli noted that cardiac survival rate is an internationally recognized measure of an EMS system's effectiveness.

Turning to the operating budget, Chief Lucarelli said 82 percent of the department's revenue is spent on personnel. The remainder of the budget is divided into Interfunds (e.g., Information Technology services, fleet maintenance), supplies, and professional services (e.g., utilities, maintenance of 800mhz radio system). The Fire Department's revenues represent approximately 35 percent of its operating budget, compared to five percent for most fire departments. The revenue is generated primarily through fire contracts with neighboring jurisdictions. Chief Lucarelli reviewed the following 2002-2004 expenditure controls: 1) prioritized and delayed equipment and supply purchases, 2) changed hiring practices to reduce overtime expenditures due to vacancies, and 3) delayed facility maintenance projects.

Chief Lucarelli said the department conducts annual inspections of schools, public assemblies, commercial property, and multifamily occupancies. The goal of the inspection services function is to minimize fire losses, provide life safety for occupants and firefighters, and to comply with requirements of the Washington State Insurance Rating Bureau and the Fire Department's accreditation status. More than 20 million square feet of space has been added to the department's inspection responsibility since 1994. However, no resources have been added to respond to the increased demand for inspection services. Due to limited resources, approximately 1,000 inspections were not completed in 2003. Chief Lucarelli said staff has discussed the possibility of establishing a fee for annual fire and life safety inspections. Another alternative is to allocate a portion of the revenue generated by development to fire inspection services.

Chief Lucarelli explained that one firefighter per platoon was reassigned from Light Force 3 to Battalion 1 effective April 1, 2004, to address the overall emergency and non-emergency needs of the department. He feels this enhances the overall safety of the department. However, this reassignment reduces staffing and the operational capability of the Light Force. Chief Lucarelli asked Council to consider the option of increasing staffing by one constant fixed position, which would require four firefighters at an estimated annual cost of \$312,000.

Moving to facility needs, Chief Lucarelli said a recent study of fire system needs produced the recommendation for an additional fire station in the downtown area. Staff is interested in exploring the feasibility of identifying a site for a future downtown station.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Chief Lucarelli said a permit is required for public assemblages but an inspection fee is not charged.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Chief Lucarelli recommended two additional FTEs at an estimated cost of \$175,000 per year to complete all inspections in the city.

Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Chief Lucarelli said some properties are inspected four times a year or as frequently as monthly, depending on the activities and materials on site.

Responding to Mr. Degginger, Chief Lucarelli said approximately 800 businesses conduct a self-inspection annually. These are small occupancies in which the incidence or likelihood of fire is extremely low. In response to Dr. Davidson, Fire Marshall Steve Nuttall said the current return rate on self-inspection forms is about 75 percent and a third notice will be sent soon.

Mr. Lee commented on the importance of inspections in overall fire prevention efforts.

Mayor Marshall noted Council consensus to direct staff to develop inspection fee alternatives, research approaches used by other jurisdictions, and to prepare optional fee structures (ranging from partial to full cost recovery) for Council consideration.

Dr. Davidson clarified his earlier suggestion that perhaps a portion of B&O tax collections could be reallocated to fund inspections.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Chief Lucarelli recommended restoring Light Force staffing levels.

Mayor Marshall requested further analysis of appropriate staffing levels before making a decision. Following additional questions, Mrs. Marshall noted Council consensus to direct staff to provide more information on the Light Force including the tactics and activities of the firefighters. Ms. Balducci requested information regarding Light Force staffing in other jurisdictions. Mr. Degginger requested a job description for the staff assistant and the Light Force.

Regarding a downtown fire station, Mayor Marshall suggested exploring the feasibility of locating a downtown station in the first floor of a high-rise building. Mr. Degginger is in favor of directing staff to study options for locating a downtown station. Chief Lucarelli suggested a multifunction facility in which perhaps a community center and fire station could be co-located. Mayor Marshall noted Council support to direct staff to begin identifying possible locations and facilities for a downtown fire station.

Police Chief Jim Montgomery highlighted three departmental achievements in 2003: 1) creation of Special Enforcement Team, 2) creation of Crowd Control Unit, and 3) reorganization of Community Services and Investigations. Reviewing crime statistics, Chief Montgomery said there are fewer reported crimes today than 20 years ago, no criminal homicides have occurred in the past five years, Part I index crimes are down from 2002, and police response times continue to improve. A survey indicates that residents feel safe in their neighborhoods and downtown, and 80 percent of those who have had contact with the police say the handling was good or excellent.

Major new directions for the Police Department in 2004 are the New City Building, CALEA accreditation, and continued implementation of the wireless mobile data communications system. The 911 Communications Center will undergo an accreditation visit in August. Chief Montgomery reviewed the primary policy issues for the 2005-2006 budget including communications center staffing, Opticom intersection control devices, and wireless solutions for motorcycle and bicycle officers as well as investigators. Overtime expenditures in the communications center are increasing and the average full-time employee works 32 hours in overtime per month. As a result, employee turnover is higher than desired and morale is suffering, while the crowded physical working conditions are stressful.

Chief Montgomery explained that the new technology in which broadband providers can provide telephone service presents a challenge for 911 operators. When used for 911 calls, such phone systems do not provide number identification or location information to assist emergency personnel. Therefore, 911 operators will have to spend more time interviewing callers using these phone systems in order to respond properly. Chief Montgomery feels it is important for citizens to understand that broadband phone service does not provide 911 operators with location information.

Mayor Marshall asked staff to include a notification requirement for Comcast regarding its phone service and to add this issue to the federal legislative agenda.

Moving on, Chief Montgomery noted that Opticom light-preemption technology reduces the chance of an accident involving an emergency vehicle and enables a quicker response. The Police Department is exploring wireless solutions for motorcycle and bicycle officers and investigators.

Councilmember Lee expressed support for the wireless communication systems, which helps with enforcement as well as officer safety.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Chief Montgomery said 911 dispatcher turnover is higher than desired. Dispatcher training is lengthy (7 to 9 months) and complex, particularly since Bellevue's communications center dispatches both police and fire/medical calls.

Mayor Marshall would like staff to analyze the feasibility of having dispatchers designated as either police or fire/medical operators to reduce the required training period and decrease stress levels for dispatch personnel.

(a) Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program – Project Ballot Process

Laurie Gromala, Transportation Assistant Director, recalled a recent neighborhood traffic calming project in which the ballot process was questioned by some residents. Concerns were raised regarding the manner in which ballots were collected and how information was shared. Council directed staff at that time to review the process and to come back with findings and recommendations.

Karen Gonzalez, Neighborhood Services Manager, said the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program began in 1985 and typically focused on only the adjacent property owners of a street experiencing a traffic problem. In 1998, Council directed staff to expand the public involvement process to the entire neighborhood surrounding a proposed project. Under the current process, a traffic committee of local residents is organized to work with staff in developing a plan and initiating neighborhood involvement. Residents are provided with voters pamphlets describing the project and alternatives. The City allows one ballot to be submitted for each household, and ballots are accepted by mail or in person. A minimum of 65 percent support by residents is needed to proceed with a project.

Ms. Gonzalez noted criticisms of the ballot process during consideration of the 168th Avenue/14th Street traffic calming plan. Approximately 14 projects have been planned over the past 4 to 5 years using the current process, and this is the first location in which issues were raised regarding the ballot process. At Council's direction, staff reviewed the process and recommends the following modifications:

1. Maps showing which households have returned their ballots and how they voted will not be prepared prior to completion of the balloting process.
2. City staff will provide postage-paid envelopes for returning ballots.
3. Copies of a ballot will be allowed if provided by City staff and reflect an original signature.
4. Traffic Committee volunteers will not be allowed to collect and return ballots.

Ms. Gonzalez said another option is to allow Traffic Committee members to collect ballots as long as the ballots have been sealed in an envelope by the voting resident.

Mayor Marshall noted two recent projects have not raised any issues in terms of the balloting process.

Mr. Chelminiak spoke in favor of allowing Traffic Committee members to collect ballots in sealed envelopes and forward them to the City. On the issue of requiring signatures, he questioned how a controversy over a signature would be addressed.

Deputy Mayor Noble sees no problem with accepting mailed and hand-delivered ballots and feels that neighbors for and against a project should be able to collect and return ballots to the City. Ms. Balducci concurred and opined that the important goal is to encourage as much participation by residents as possible. Mr. Lee expressed support for Mr. Noble's suggestion.

- ➡ Deputy Mayor Noble moved to approve balloting process Option A, amended as follows to: 1) allow any resident to collect and return ballots, 2) allow copies of ballots, 3) require signatures on ballots, and 4) provide an advisory on the ballot suggesting that residents return their own ballots to the City. Ms. Balducci seconded the motion.
- ➔ Dr. Davidson moved to amend the main motion to require ballots to be returned by mail only and to require residents to request additional ballots from the City if needed. Mr. Lee seconded the motion.
- ➔ The proposed amendment to the main motion failed by a vote of 2-5, with Dr. Davidson and Mr. Lee in favor.
- ➡ The motion to approve balloting process Option A, amended as follows to: 1) allow any resident to collect and return ballots, 2) allow copies of ballots, 3) require signatures on ballots, and 4) provide an advisory on the ballot suggesting that residents return their own ballots, carried by a vote of 6-1, with Dr. Davidson dissenting.

(c) Neighborhood Investment Strategy – West Lake Hills Update

[This Agenda Item was addressed in the Regular Session under City Manager's Report, Agenda Item 5.]

(d) Contractor Advisory Group – [Postponed]

At 8:02 p.m., Mayor Marshall declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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